



**Historical Background of the United Evangelical Church In Cuba.**

**Lutheran Synod.**

**Author: Bishop Ismael Laborde Figueras.**

**2017**



**(Left to right) Rev. Martha, Rev. Yamilka, Rev. Leonel, Rev. Milaidis, Bishop Ulises Aguero, Rev. Aramis, Bishop Ismael, Bishop Medardo Gomez, Rev. Blanca Irma, Rev. Rosellys, Rev. Virgen, Rev. Miguel and Rev. Halbert, at Ismael Laborde's Consacration, junio 2017.**





**From left to right Bishop Ulises Aguero, Reverend OYSTEN Lied, Reverend, Reverend Aramis Rodriguez Brooks, Reverend Yamilka Hernandez, Bishop Ismael Laborde, Reverend Rosellys Laborde and Reverend Martha Yolanda Romero Lorenzo at the XII Synod closing mass. (2016)**

## PROLOGUE TO THE SECOND EDITION, 2017...

The first edition of the Monograph Challenge of raising a Lutheran Ministry ended in 2010 covered an absolute existing emptiness concerning the Lutheranism history in Cuba.

In that as well as in this edition the historiography investigation done by Dr. Roberto HUEBNER IS DONE, PASTOR AND ITINERANT LUTHERAN Church Missouri Synod professor. What there's no doubt is a precious elaborated contribution for more than a decade of studies, interviews and investigations.

In this second edition from 2006, some specification concerning the emerging of the new Lutheran Synod starting from 1998 are done, concreted in 2003 when the church was received as a Fraternal Cuban churches Council associated member, after this the legal registering according to Resolution 76 2012 from the Judicial Ministry National Direction, now as an institution called the United Evangelical Church in Cuba Lutheran Synod.

Unfavorable events happened for the church after the first edition, the unilateral one side Lutheran Hour decision of closing its Ministry Center in Cuba, the Missionary Society for Cuba dissolution and the non adapted agreement performance by the Saint Lois Missouri Concordia Theology Seminary Hispanic Center, and Concordia University in Wisconsin. However all these years we have had Normission economic and spiritual support as our main international counterpart.

The church has kept its ecumenism vocation at promoting relations with the other Lutheran churches and institutions in America and Europe, and by its membership in the Cuban Churches Council as a full right member since 20132, in the Latin American Churches Council( CLAI) since and the petition of entering the World Lutheran Federation in 2016.

In the very year 2012 when the Lutheran Hour announced its closing of their ministry Center in Cuba, the Church constituted Project Joel Foundation with its volunteers and self sustainable methods.

There's a disported index i8n this second edition consisting in 5 chapters which allows to add new graphic evidence of the church spreading, the new ordination to the Lutheran Ministry the Diaconal work performance and the event organized by Joel Project.

Finally 5there are also reflected evidence and information about self stainable Projects in which the church is involved in order to face the process of foreign financial support independence.

There is a second volume that includes historical documents as attachments, some are inedited documents that prove the historic role Lutheranism in Cuba and give a certain support to criteria value of the author historical sense, who through 25 years without being interrupted has worked in planting Lutheran church in the country, in spite of defamation, betrays, conflicts and calmed times. The Unite Evangelical Church is without any doubt a reference in the Ecumenical life in Cuba, in humanitarian accompaniment to the people before several hurricanes in the last few years and a cross theology exposed as a method of making national theology.

I hope the readers may find the necessary information for covering expectances in relation to the challenge of raising or planting a Lutheran Ministry in Cuba. Bishop Ismael Laborde Figueras.

June, 2017.



## Index

	Page
Introduction .....	5
Chapter 1. Challenges of the Lutheran work in Cuba. ....	6
1.1 Beginning of the Lutheran work in Cuba.....	6
1.2 Awaking from a dream.....	7
1.3 Ordination to the church ministry till 1995.....	8
1.4 1mistakes and conflicts.....	11
Chapter 2. Anew Lutheran Synod is born in Cuba.....	13
2.1 Ended Fact.....	13
2.2 Theology and ecclesiology of the new Synod.....	15
2.3 Foundation events.....	18
2.4 Concordia Seminary.....	43
Chapter 3. Christ for all the nations. Project Joel Cuba.....	50
3.1 Events and areas of impact.....	50
3.2 Ecumenist will.....	64
Chapter 4. Our seal. The Cuban Way.....	66
4.1 Music and Liturgy.....	66
4.2 Synods, sacraments and rites.....	68
Chapter 5 new events and realities.....	70
5.1 Visits.....	70
5.2 New ordinations.....	71
5.3 New missions and congregations.....	73
5.4 Humanitarian help to the people.....	81
5.5 PROJECT Joel Cuba Foundation. Projects.....	82
5.6 Unite Evangelical Church Foundation Phase Conclusion.....	84

## **Challenges of raising a Lutheran Ministry in Cuba.**

### **Introduction.**

In JUNE 2009 I HAD AN INTERESTING TALK TO Victoria Cortes Bishop from Nicaraguan Lutheran church and vice president of the World Lutheran Federation for Latin America, while a visit she did to Cuba as a representative for Central America ACT. Victoria explained she was forced to prepare a material about the Lutheran church in her country, for many people asked her questions and she had to repeat the same story once again.

I carefully listened and then I told her, the same thing happens to me, I have to explain over and over again the same story about Lutheranism in Cuba, on the other hand, time is passing by and it is time to prepare the church memory.

Later on I remembered that a German pastor who came to Santiago de Cuba with a group of Lutherans in 2001 asked me Why Lutheranism in Cuba.



**German Lutherans Visit, 2001**

Some people with good or bad intentions have manifested or affirmed some doubts about the true theological, historical and ecclesial of the Unite Evangelical Church in Cuba Lutheran Synod identity. Others counter put Lutheran Confessionality with ecumenism and there are also those who say we arte charismatic evangelical or Baptist Pentecostal.

What is certain is that we have been a fruit from a history and a process led by the Holy Spirit in a congregational Synod acting. We are the result of God's Kingdom Gospel Proclamation, we have lived peace and conflict times at the same way. But there is no doubts we are an authentic Lutheran evangelic community attached to Augsburg 1530 Confession an to the Universal Creeds.

We are simply Christian- LUTHERANS IN A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY WITH THE SERVING VOCATION OF accompanying the Cuban people in a pastoral manner, as well as supporting the poor, needy and emarginated



in the latitudes we can get. On the other hand our history as a national church is linked to the international Lutheranism.

Lutheranism origins.

On October 31<sup>st</sup> 1517 the compassionate Doctor Martin Luther nailed the outstanding 95 theses on the Wittenberg Church as an expression of his opposition to the teaching and practice of the indulgences sale. Afterwards in 1530 the evangelical Augsburg Confession was edited, that with the Ecumenical Creeds was the doctrine body the princes, theologians and Saxonian German cities, ruled at that time by Prince Frederick the Wise, relative of Carlos I of Spain, who was besides Carlos V in the Roman Empire.

Luther only wanted the church to be reformed: that is to say, CORRECT THE MISTAKES AND PERMIT THE Eucharist Cup to lay people, to dial the Bible as God's Word over the tradition, rediscover the cross theology, the only Grace, the two Kingdom doctrines among other themes.

The pope and the emperor, besides forcing Luther without any success in order to refuse about his evangelical and Bible's doctrine proceeded to the excommunication stimulation of the Augustin monk who shocked Rome.

The Luther's death in 1546 was followed by the 30 years war between Catholic and evangelic. In the Lutheranism bosom crashes were produced by synergism and other mistakes, finally in 1577 the Concordia Formula was signed, which implied a concordat that sealed the doctrinal unit between Lutherans.

During all this process the Lutheranism was passed to other states out of German, specially to Scandinavia countries. There were also several immigrant waves to the United States of America.

There were important Synods in USA AS : Missouri Lutheran Synod and that of Wisconsin. There are also independent Lutheran Churches.

The Lutheran work came to Cuba as the result of the work done by missionary from the South District of LUTHERAN Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). I want to thank the late friend and Lutheran teacher for Cubans Dr Roberto Huebner for the collecting of information and testimonies that he did concerning the beginnings of Lutheranism in Cuba.

Many of the data and information given from Dr. Roberto Huebner presented in the round table meeting in Havana in 1995 are our reference point in this historical background of the Lutheran church in Cuba.

This background includes 24 years of experiences in the life and ministry in the Lutheran work and ministry of the author in Cuba, enriched with a document sample, testimonies and experiences of lay people, pastors and people from the Lutheran church and from other Cuban evangelical traditions as well as friends from Lutheran institutions in other countries.

## **CHAPTER 1. Challenges of Lutheran work in Cuba.**

### **1.1 Beginning of the Lutheran work in Cuba.**

The first signs of Lutheranism in Cuba get back to 1898-99 when Rev. C.J. BRODERS worked as a chaplain of the American army during the Cuban -Spanish-American war. His mission was to cover the spiritual necessities of the young Lutherans who joined the American army and at the same time to explore opportunities for opening the missionary work in Cuba.

IN 1910 Rev. Richard Ortel, travel to Isle of Pine ( Isle of YOUTH) looking for warm waters in Santa Fe, he started to congregate German and English speaking people in the Methodist temple. Later on he started work in Gerona, SANTA Barbara, he had contacts in other places, including crocodile or South Coast. Everything points there were no Spanish service until 1959.

Time passed and on February 2 1913, Rev. Oertel offered a service on the German ship Princess EITEL Friedriho, at Havana Harbor . There was also a service at Havana City with 16 adults people who prayed so God could send a pastor to Cuba, that would happen 33 years later.

There were occasionally several pastors and vicarious from Missouri in Cuba after Oertel as: Walter H. Hafnch (1914) Henry I Nauman (1920) Labrance H.E. Wallnweb (1930) Hugo Hartman (1930) Wilfred Avelallemant (1940) Herman Noll ( 1940-44) Zoilo Delgado (1950) Herman Glinke (1956-60).

At crocodile on December 14, 1941 Rev. Herman Noll dedicated a wooden temple, which still exist. He and his wife worked at the parish and the elementary school.

In 1946 Rev. Paul C. Neip was comissionated in Havana, Rev. Braules followed him. In 1949 Rev. Fred Pankov Kept serving Havana. In 1952 Rev. Hartman Gene was called on to serve in Havana. As Pankov serve at Marti residential area, Glinke ministered at an adapter house in Vedado.

In 1956, Rev. Eugene Gruell CAME TO Havana as missionary, meanwhile Glinke was resigned to Gerona. During this period several Cuban laymen, from other denominations were involved in the Lutheran church work, we can mention to Eduardo Llerena among others, he died in USA being LCMS pastor, Gustavo PUERTO (WHO GOT TO BE A PASTOR IN LCMS) Blas Serrano, Felipe Hernandez and later on Duban Guerrero in some way.



**Rev. Ismael Laborde, Rev. Gustavo Puerto and his wife, USA, August 2000**



As a resume, until 1960 the parishes were ministered in Isle of Pine, two congregations in Havana, Clara Mas school and a very small group in Boca de Galafre, Pinar del Rio. Two beautiful shrines financed by the Lutheran ladies, stayed for the glory of God: One at Miramar in 7<sup>th</sup> and 60 and other in New Gerona, across the police station. A cultural institution works at the first and the Science Academy stands in the second one.

Between the Years 1960-70, the missionaries, lay workers, and most of the Cuban members emigrated to Florida, this emigration was the factor of the Spanish Lutheran ministry in Florida out of Saint Mathew church where Eugene Gruell was a pastor.

It was a privilege for the author of this background to meet Rev. HERMAN Glinke and Eugene Gruell while visiting USA IN 2000; from an invitation done by Dr. Roberto Gonzalez, adviser for the Spanish LCMS ministries, from a petition done by Alberto Garcia. An important note for history is that Dr. Eugene Gruell begged his pardon for he didn't leave any leader or Cuban pastor ready when he left Cuba. Dr. Eugene later on sent a letter where he gave his opinions concerning the Lutheran church which stands in Santiago de Cuba.

## 1.2 Awaking from a dream.

After the 60's the few Lutheran church members who stayed didn't have ordained pastors, or any trained and prepared person in Lutheran confessions and ecclesiology. Mr. Roberto Bartutis Bartutis, an ex Seminary pupil from the Eastern Cuban Baptist Convention (WHO DIDN'T FINISHED HIS STUDIES FOR HE WASN'T A LEARNED MAN) was left as a guardian of the temple and properties in Havana. Meantime Rev. Ernst Kart from German origin stayed in Isle of Pine.

Mr. Bartutis traded the church properties in a strange way, he began to live with his family in the pastor's house in Atabey neighborhood and was denied himself that the Cuba Ecumenical Council (Cuban Churches Council today) protected the temple.

Bartutis contributed to the Lutheran properties loss in Havana due to his little capacity, these patrimony passed to the government, while Rev. Kart abandoned Isle of Pine and delivered the properties to the Cuban government.

Later on in 1970 the International Cooperation Director World Lutheran Federation (WLF) visited the scattered Cuban Lutherans. Santal Mission did the same in 1981.

In 1977 the Cuban government allowed that 100 personalities from foreign churches traveled to Cuba for the first time for a meeting at Matanzas theological Seminary, Dr. Roberto Huebner was one of them, he met the Ecumenical Cuba Council at that time: Ceballos, Arce and Livio Diaz, they told Huebner that the Cuban government was interested in giving back the church properties to a responsible Cuban group.

In the 80's some Lutheran foreign professors taught to LUTHERAN STUDENTS AT Matanzas Seminary, Roberto Huebner, Bishop Harold Maalshizky and Nilton Giese. This last one supported the Cuban Lutherans to organize the Lutheran church (Lutheran Confession Evangelical Church)

In this period 1983-87, the Cuban LUTHERANS WERE SUPPORTED IN THE PROCESS OF CHUCH RE ORGANIZATION BY BISHOP Emilio Hernandez from the Episcopal church, bishop Armando Rodriguez from the Methodist Church, Dr. Adolfo Ham, Rev. Raul Suarez and Dr. Rodolfo Juarez.

On May 19 1989, 22 people met in Gerona and constituted the Directing board Lutheran Confession Evangelical Church in Cuba (IECLC) at this same meeting there were established the rules and Constitution with the collaboration of Nilton Giese. In the statutes the following social rules were proclaimed:

The IECLC declares its intentions to support:

1-Struggle for Peace world wide

2.-Struggle against nuclear weapons from all the potencies.

3.-Struggle against all kind of injustice, race or sex discrimination as well as economic or religious discrimination world wide.

4.-A new international economic order, that ease the social justice and the development of all the countries.

5.- Latin America Economic Integration.

6.- The non foreign debt payment in its nowadays conditions, that led peoples to be more in debts.

7.- The fight for human rights in all those countries that by religion, sex, race, politic or economic reasons violate the elementary mankind rights, as the right to life, liberty, work, education, culture, health, etc. We don't see these rights from the point of view of those countries that have violated them in some way in order to make the hegemony value, but from the point of view of those people that suffered those violations.

8.-The South African people struggle as the other people struggle against apartheid and the lack of justice generated by this regime

9.-To the peoples that fight for getting their economic, political and cultural liberty and the churches that make pastoral and social work in this line.

10.-The social and Bible theological reflection that spring up from the liberation theology.

The existing of these principles and rules in the statutes were a reclamation item by the international counterpart, and by national church representatives. Finally at the IECLC annual Assembly in 1994 these rules were canceled from the statutes.

On May 15, 1990 Te Ecumenical Council of Cuba adopted an agreement at the directive board by which the IECLC was officially recognized as a Lutheran Church under the legal umbrella of CEC, until 2007, when it received the independent judicial recognition by the judicial Ministry

In 1991, Mr. Gunleik Seirstad Secretary for Santal Mission and Mr. Bjør Wegge, in order to know about the Lutheran church and support its organization process.

In 1992 the IECLC had Works in Gerona, Cocodrilo, Pinar del Rio, Havana, Artemisa, La Salud, Matanzas and Santiago de Cuba. Forming small groups with pastors who had little theological preparation, except Rev. Ramon Gonzalez Vergara graduated from Matanzas Seminary.

### **1.3- Ordination to the church ministry till 1995.**

At leaving Cuba the Missouri Synod North American missionaries, the Lutheran work remained without any learned leaders or pastors concerning the Lutheran ECCLESIOLOGY AND CONFESSION. Dr. Eugene Gruell gives us a characterization of the period (...) IN BRIEF, SIMPLE AND STRONG respect to Lutheran work in Cuba. Nothing else but the name has been there. There were non prepared leader, all members or almost all those we had there left the country, and that's why there has been confusion and mistake comedy 8 LETTER SENT BY Eugene Gruell to Rev. Laborde in December 2000)



In 1980 Rev. Wiloch from Santal Mission made a historical mistake, at doing a private ordination at Duban Guerrero house. Wiloch emitted a document where he authorized Duban GUERRERO, Antonio Abad and Roberto Bartutis to baptize and minister the Eucharist; Wiloch himself later on was repented for this mistake.

These ordinations were never recognized by Lutheran Missouri Synod (LCMS) or by other foreigner Synod, nor later on in Cuba, the very Antonio Abad was ordained again in 1990 and Duban Guerrero didn't exercised the ministry in USA when he emigrated to there.

Only Bartutis took this ordinations seriously, in which we must establish a difference between an imposing hands private act and the Lutheran Church calling doctrine to the ordained ministry.

In 1995 when the IECLC entered the CEC as a full right member, Dr. Johannes Gedrat, by means of Rev. Jose Lopez, then executive secretary for the CIC, informed the CEC General Assembly that Bartutis ordination wasn't valid and that LCMS didn't recognize him as his representative in Cuba at any time.

The second ordination ceremony that is the first legally recognized in Cuba took place on November 4<sup>th</sup> 1990, when the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) THROUGH BISHOP Rafael Malpica Padilla who placed his hands and ordained priests to Ramon Benito Ebanks, Antonio Abad and Ramon GONZALEZ Vergara, while brother Samuel Ruiz was ordained deacon.

Later on Abad died in a car accident. Ramon Gonzalez and Samuel Ruiz emigrated to USA. THIS SECOND ORDAINATION GAVE PLACE TO AN EPISCOPAL LINE IN Cuba, while the church declared to be Missourian and LCMS historical heir by doctrine.

In 1991 at 240 high Bernaza, Havana City Dora Martinez Roja's home worked the emerging church office. A congregation was organized there ministered by Dario who was Dora's nephew.



**Rev. Ismael Laborde with Dora Martínez**

(12) In 1991 Raul Falcon Concepcion was ordained as a priest who ministered in Artemisa and came from los Pinos Nuevos as a layman. In 1992 there were deacons ordained and installed at Dora's Martinez house (Dora's brother) in Santiago de Cuba Mr. Ismael Laborde Figueras and YOLANDA Lafita Martinez.

Concerning Ismael in 1992 he was ordained deacon without being baptized, later on in October 1993 the Annual Assemble of IECLC agreed the ordination of Mr. Ismael Laborde as a priest during the closing service of the 1993 Assemble Laborde and his family were baptized by Rev. Ivar Agoy from Norway having as a witness to Johannes Gedrat for Latin America and Mrs. Rosa Pozo.



**Ivar Agoy baptizing Ismael Laborde.**

The hand imposing ceremony and installation as a priest of Ismael Laborde in Santiago de Cuba took place on December 19<sup>th</sup> 1993. in Santiago de Cuba. This service was ministered by Rev. Ebanks, Rev. Elmer Labastida second Baptist Church Pastor in Santiago and a friend participated. In this very service, rev. LABORDE PUT HIS HANDS ON HIS DAUGHTER Rosellys Laborde Montes de Oca and Amaury Hung as deacons, there were baptized at the same time Rudy Gonzalez and Denny Pardo as the first children of the church in Santiago.



**Consecration of Ismael Laborde as a priest, 1993**





**Consecration of Rosellys Laborde and Amaury Hung as deacons, 1993**

#### **1.4 Mistakes and conflicts.**

Firm its organization starting from the 80's, the LUTHERAN WORK IN Cuba was enrolled in fighting and conflicts, whose common denominator was lack of Lutheran Cosmo vision, absent of adequate accountancy, and the poor work for evangelizing and discipleship. The church and workers, in most cases had not an adequate Lutheran doctrine preparation, so they didn't have a Lutheran thought structure.

From 1994 the first manifestations of the beginning of deep structural crisis in the emerging Lutheran work in Cuba. The differences Ebanks- Omaira, joined to the inner struggles at Marianao congregation. Finally this congregation was out of the IECLC, interpersonal conflicts between the directive board members took place.



**Service in Mariano 84 street, in May 1994.**

In February 1995 the round table was held in Havana ( formed by representatives of the Evangelical Confession Church in Cuba, Lutheran Church in America Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Santal Mission and World Lutheran Federation).

The foreign institution representative parts criticized the everlasting character of the episcopate, the administering way for resources by the Cuban part was also questioned. It is observed that their isn't legal procedures for receiving or making pastors or congregations cease. What gives the image of a "ghost" church, in an incomprehension context of the Cuban Episcopal government model.

Two opposed tendencies emerged from this round table in the Cuban Lutheran work, which concluded with the determination of disintegrate the National Directive board, without convocation to a National Assembly which was the stipulated in the Constitution. 5b(15) The same way he named another directive board formed by new people who in some cases have never had links to the Lutheran church or didn't fulfill the requirements.

The same way the new board determined without consultation f the counterparts to disintegrate the Round Table, WITH THE PROPOSAL OF ONLY STARTING BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE INVOLVED FOREIGN ENTITIES.

In August 1996, LCMS and Santal Mission representatives met in Saint Lois, Missouri and wrote a declaration about the IECLC crisis and expressed the ten listed congregations in 1995 rights to participate in the church life. The WLF representative Sylvio Snaider as well as Rev. Rafael Malpica from the ELCA didn't attend, but this last one had a phone participation and emitted minute about the document written by Oysten Lied and Johannes Gedrat.

In the middle of this emerging conflict IECLC was approved as a full right member in the March 1995 Assembly, Rev. Raul Suarez made a public alert on the inner conflicts which had place in the church. The IECLC entering right to the CEC was defended by brothers: Ismael Laborde, Dagoberto Herrera and Aliuska Perez.

In June 1995, the church in Santiago de Cuba, declared illegal the directing board. In such a circumstances, the pastor from Santiago, with the collaboration of brother Narziso leader of the Christian Student Movement, established contacts with Dr. Franklin Canelos, then Secretary for Latin America and the Caribbean from the WLF development, demanding the assumption of the fact.

As a result a delegation formed by Rev. Oysten Lied and Ivar Agoy from Santal Mission visited Cuba representing the foreign involved entities in the Lutheran work in Cuba, with the purpose of investigating the real situation. The visit finished in a round table in which besides Norwegians the litigant parts participated in which two groups were clearly seen, one whose leader would be Ramon Benito Ebanks and the other guided by Rev. Ismael Laborde Figueras. As guarantee for the Cuban Churches Council took part Rev. Otoniel Bermudez, Executive Secretary and David Leed, Treasurer. The round table which was held in the church the New Pines on Suarez street in Old Havana in August 1995, agreed to named an organizing Commission that replaced the Directing Board that same year in the See of the New Pines Church.

It is valid to mention that, because of economic limitations and other reasons, the Organizing Commission made up two representatives of each part ( Armando de la Paz and Josefina on the one hand and Carlos Rojas and Antonio Ruiz on the other hand) WAS LIMITED TO CONVOCATE TO THE Assembly. Even though the dissidents arrived to the meeting place, Dr. Johannes Gedrat LCMS representative advised the assembly to be post posed to February 1996 and taking the chance both parts are present taught some teachings about the Lutheran church.

This episode ended in March 1996, during the III IECLC General Assembly celebrated in the See of the New Pines Church it IS A PITY THE Assembly resulted (6) in a division (16) of the Lutheran Work. The part formed by the congregations of Santiago de Cuba, Manzanillo, Marianao and Boyeros declared a fraud during the elections and emitted a document with its ethic claims. In the subsequent years the Lutheran work decreased, and new separations in both parts were produced, that decided to walk on different roads.

## **Chapter 2.- A new Lutheran Synod is born in Cuba.**

### **2.1 Done Fact.**

Between the years 1996 and 2002, the New Synod worked in an informal way, without legal recognition and under the name first as Evangelical Confession Lutheran Church Synod in Cuba- Self sustainable, and then Lutheran Synod Santiago de Cuba. In 2003 the church got the legal support of the Cuban Churches Council in the category of fraternal associate , under the nomenclature of the United Evangelical Church in Cuba, later on in 2012 under Resolution 76 of that same year dictated by National Association Direction of the Judicial Ministry it remained registered the United Evangelical Church in Cuba Lutheran Synod, with its official See on 454 Juan Gualberto Gomez street, Los Olmos Santiago de Cuba.

In the legal recognizing process of the Church by government it had an important place the Norwegian bishop Halvor Nordau, who from far away has been a companion and friend.



**Bishop Halvor Nordau visiting Cuba, 2011**

In May 2013, at ending the CLAI General Assembly sessions in Havana Libre Hotel, bishop Laborde was invited to have a working meeting (17) 3.-b) with bishop Medardo E. Gomez from the Salvadorian Lutheran Church, besides bishop Victoria Cortez from the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church Faith and Hope and Melvin Jimenez Marin from the Costarican Lutheran Church. Several speeches were delivered by the parts, all of them concerning the reality of Lutheranism in Cuba.



Bishop Victoria expressed “they say there isn’t a church in Cuba with Lutheran identity, but she had heard commentaries, it was an evangelical church, with a Pentecostal-Baptist style. Bishop Laborde answered with solid arguments the Lutheran church confessant-confessional character starting its auchthonus-autonomus condition. With theology and contextual liturgy in Cuba. Bishop Medardo pointed that every church works according to its country, condition we all must respect, and that he had got information from Caridad Diego, Religious Affairs Office chief there are two registered Lutheran Churches in Cuba and one of them is the United Evangelical Church.

Nowadays the Synod is made up the following priests: Ismael Laborde Figueras, Virgen Laborde Figueras, Carlos Rojo GONZALEZ ,Aramis Rodriguez Brooks, Yamilka Hernadez Guzman, Rosellys Laborde Montes De Oca and Martha Romero Lorenzo and the Deacons are: Norma Murillo Millan, Gregorio Ramírez Hardy, Pavel Martínez Blanco, Milaidis Herrera Hechavarria, Candelaria Figueroa Palay, Ángela Figueroa Palay. The congregations are concentrated in Santiago de Cuba, Guantanamo and Havana City, some congregations have disappeared because their pastors have emigrated to another countries and those communities met at private houses. Today the Synod has 8 properties for teaching and service.

The Synod has organized the Concordia Seminary, it has graduated 8 students in the Seminary level, 4 in Christian Education level and 40 in the congregational level. The same way for carrying on the evangelistic work and civil society relationship the Synod has organized the JOEL-CUBA Project Foundation, as an ecumenical vocation.

Let’s say that, the resume presented in these paragraphs contains an over 24 years history. The followings will be different moments in the traffic of the challenging, intense and short history of the Lutheran Ministry in Cuba.

Even though the two Lutheran parts had been working separately in February 1998, by means of Rev. Ebanks invitation Rev. Laborde attended a meeting in La Lisa with IECLC directives, getting some agreements, but those didn’t have continuity.

In such circumstances in Summer that same year the Lutheran Church Santiago Synod was constituted, made up by Santiago de Cuba and Havana in the beginning, after that La Lisa and Artemisa signed a union plan. The following people were recognized as pastors: Ismael Laborde and Virgen Laborde in Santiago de Cuba, Carlos Rojo in Havana, Gilda Rosa Perez and Raul Falcon in La Lisa and Luis Barreto in Artemisa.



**Pastors in Synod 2002**

## **2.2 Theology and ecclesiology of the new Synod**

Since 1998 to 2012, the pastors and lay people were reviewing and adequating the new synod faith confessions, starting from the following criteria:

- 1.- Bible base. The Bible as God's Word.
- 2.-Confessionality. The Adherence to Augsburg Confession of 1530.
- 3.- Conation. The UEC is part of the international Lutheran Community and part of the universal church.
- 4.-Historicity. The UEC has its origin at the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church missionary work. Its ordination line comes from IECLC8 which is connected to ELCA)
- 5.- Formation. The UEC HAS AN ORGANIZED AND WORKING Seminary and for this it has count on the collaboration of the Hispanic theology Center from Concordia Seminary with it See in Missouri, activity coordinated with the Missionary Society for Cuba.
- 6.- Policy, Society and Relationships'. The church recognizes that the power of the sword corresponds to the State, while the one of the Word corresponds to the Church, the diaconal work and interest for man in his holistic focus, THESE ELEMENTS SERVE AS PRAGMATIC PLATFORM OF THE Lutheran work, while in its march the Synod assumes an ecumenical vocation as well as pastoral accompaniment to the Cuban people.
7. Unit is possible in the diversity, without violating Confessionality, order and being under ecclesial authority.
8. The theology and ecclesiology are the result of systematization and thought of Cuban laymen and clergy.

In the different synods these years the doctrine base and the structural church working were checked and reviewed.

From 1998 the studies on Bible and Confessions for the leaders and church members started. In 2002 the Concordia Seminary was reorganized and began to work in Santiago de Cuba, later this seminary organized a branch classroom in Havana. In 2008 the first seminary students were graduated who starting from the group technique work contribute to an ecclesiology and theological thought formation, called to promote the church confessional unit.

As part of the organization and setting process the church constitution was elaborated.

The Constitution was elaborated as follows:

TITLE I. Faith Article. Title II Church government way.  
Title III The Church and the pastoral Ministry. Title IV Church structure  
Title V Projection and Formation. Title VI. Mends.

It is explained in details in the Constitution the doctrine bases or faith articles we resume as follows:  
Elements contained in the prologue.

- 1.- The church assumes a synod style government. It is necessary the adhesion to the Constitution and its doctrinal bases in order to be a member, every time a person or faith community is interested in being a member or sign the union plan.
- 2.- The Bible is the only rule or standard valid for evaluating preachers and their teachings.

3- The ecumenical or universal Creeds (Apostle's, Nicene, Athanasius') are Scripture witnesses, they are studied and used as an expression of our catholic faith in the practice as a church.

4.- The church and its communities adhere to Augsburg 1530 Confession, as our confession or particular Cred.

5.- The Augsburg Confession Apology, the Esmalcald articles, the Treat about Pope supremacy and Concordia Formula , with the Luther's Catechism are used for the Christian doctrine teaching.

6.- The church is God's work in our Lord Jesus Christ. Luther when he rediscovered the Gospel and proclaimed it as unique rule of the church, finds God's acting among the weak ones, the needy and the sinners with the only will of making them save by Grace. The first is to be illuminated according to God's Grace. I believe that not even by my own reason I am able to believe but the Christ who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned man.

7.- The church declares its Lutheran confession character, without pretending to be an exclusive wing, but on the contrary it is part of the universal Jesus Christ church.

8.- The church has a deep national feeling, pastors and lay work in the presentation of an ecclesial- theological school with contextual Cuban roots. THE ECCLESIOLOGY CORRESPONDS TO the gathered experiences in the practice of the member communities, as well as the conception about the government which is very peculiar. The criteria on the Mass, the Liturgy, the gifts and the pastoral Ministry are of national manufacturing, of course, taking into consideration the blessed and rich traditions heirs from our international community.

9.-The church keeps an ecumenical vocation, at recognizing the intercommunion with other Lutheran churches in the world, and by forming part of the ecumenical dialogue promoted by the Cuban Churches Council and other ecumenical institutions, whenever God's Word be the agenda center and without refusing the Lutheran Confessions.

Faith Articles ( comprises chapters 2-8 from title I)

1.- We believe in a unique GOD, WHICH IS REVELED in Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So God has revealed himself in a general way in the creation and in Jesus in a special way.

2.-The Scripture has been inspired by God, they're an all unique and unfaultable. The Scripture should interpreters itself. We don't wait for new revelations. We are in favor of a prophetic fresh word according to times and places. We take into account the criterion that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

3.- man is by his nature a sinner and needs the work and action of the Holy Spirit in his- her heart, as an act that follows to the proclamation and reception of the power and Grace Gospel. Sin is an inner and heir sickness in man, and for being liberated of Jesus Christ gave himself on the Calvary cross for our sins in a propitiatory way.

4.- Jesus Christ is true God and true man. He's our Lord, he has redeemed us and rescued from all sins, from death and devil and by his Holy and precious blood and his innocent passion and death. Jesus Christ comprises all the person hope.

5.- The Church theology is Christ centered. Christ's Cross is the center. In it God reveals His love and compassion for people. Christ can only be expressed by the three solas: Grace, Faith, Scripture.



6.- Spirit and Word walk together. The Spirit operates in the conversion and sanctification virtue of the spirit which gives life. The Holy Spirit acts by the Gospel preaching.

7.- We recognize there are two basic doctrines in the Bible: Law and Gospel, the law erases our false justice, it shows us our sinner character by nature, it always questions us. The Gospel invites us , it announces forgiveness of sins, it justifies us and announces us Grace and God's love.

8.- We practice the Bible's critic, once we should orientate ourselves in Christ and ask ourselves . What promotes Christ? Christ is the key.

9.- Faith should produce new good works and fruit. The new obedience is to work according to God's love and will. Life in prayer is a faith fruit.

10.-God gives all His spiritual blessings on sinners by special means ordered by him. These Grace means are: Gospel and Sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. It is by these grace means that Christ preserves and stretches His Church through all the world.

11.- The church is the assembly of all the believers, among who the true Gospel is preached and Sacraments are administered according to Gospel. The church is a local congregation which is organized and integrates the national synod.

12.-The church recognizes the universal priesthood of all baptized believers, but at the same time it establishes differences and by God's will, and according to an adequate order calls brothers and sisters trained for the public ministry in its categories of lay preachers, deacons, priests and bishops, which are in charge of the Word proclamation, but the Sacraments administration remain as a work for those who have being ordained are consecrated.

13.- The church preserves the unit in diversity of ecclesial rites, however these are done without sin and for keeping peace and good church order.

14.- Christians have liberty of acting it means, that till a certain measure they can carry out an honest outer life and can decide in things which knowledge can understand, but concerning spiritual things they depend on God's Grace and the Holy Spirit work.

15.-Church and State have been established by God. Christians should pay obedience to the government by conscience, unless the government ordered disobeys God. Christians and the church owe obedience to the government and this last owes protection to the church and the believers. Here there is delimitation between the power of word (which corresponds to the church) and the power of sword (which corresponds to the government)

16.- We believe in the wait for Jesus Christ coming. Day and time for his coming has not been revealed to anyone. Only God knows it.

Work. As a resume manner are presented as follows are the basic elements of the titles from II to VI.

1. The Church has a Synod government way in which the congregational local churches character is combined with the Synod or council.

2.- The local congregations or churches are autonomous concerning administration of resources, they will accept ministers and will approve workers and directives. The congregations contribute to support synod and its programs expense.

3.-All those baptized in the prove category and in the full right members can be church members.

4.) The organization, extension, or dispensing of a group or congregation are explained in the Constitution.

5.) The Ministry and ecclesial work is done by pastors and bishops, while deacons do ecclesial and sacramental work. The lay preachers can have the word ministry by the pastor s and bishop authorization.

6.) The bishop doesn't have a sacramental character. The main element is the election by the synod or convention in an open or public way by the clergy and lay people.

7.) The church has the following government structure:

- a) Local church conference) annual)
- b) District Conference (annual)
- c) Electing Synod) every five years)
- d) Annual Synod ( The clergy and lay people gather annually)

8.) The Diocesan Council will be made up by.

BISHOP) The chairman)

Superintendents (vice presidents by districts)

Secretary

Treasurer

Vocals ( they represent geographic areas and can replace vacancies)

Representatives by league of Ladies, gentlemen, youth.

Representative by JOEL Cuba Foundation.

Representative by Concordia Seminary.

9.- The specialized boards work, as pastoral commission, and judicial Council are also delimited.

10.- The 2006 constitution, was modified in its structure, not in its main contain, the doctrine bases are intact. This constitution version was the one approved by Ministry of Justice in 2012. The expression division is replaced by this of title and the item work was replaced by numbers. The concept General Assembly is replaced by this of Electing Synod every 5 years ,as the Directing Board is replaced by the Diocesan Council.

### **2.3 Fundamental Events.**



**Directing Board 2001 (from left to right) laywoman Martha Y. Romero, Rev Carlos Rojo, Rev. Ismael Laborde, Rev Virgen Laborde and laywoman Yamilka Hernández**

Parallel to the Santiago de Cuba Church Constitution elaboration we dedicated ourselves to deep in the Bible's study and Lutheran Confessions, without opening new works for several years, the preservation spirit was kept.

Simple, they persevered in the Apostle's doctrine, the breaking of bread and prayers. During these first years Rev. Laborde organized studies on homiletic, hermeneutic and Bible for the leaders. This began to be core of what would be Concordia Seminary in Cuba.



**Congregation Level Students in San Juan Park, Santiago de Cuba**

The church received several visits from abroad which were identifying it with the Lutheran community, that stimulated to set the ecclesial and theological space.

In September 1994 Rev. Christopher Anders from Berlin mission visited the church in Santiago de Cuba, later on in March 1995 he attended the anniversary foundation of the Lutheran work in Santiago de Cuba, which was held on 23 March 1992.



**Santiago de Cuba Church Celebration, 1995**



In order to support itself and look for funds for raising the church Laborde's family, starting from a loan offered by Leonel Garcia Laborde, nephew who lives in Spain, started a legal business which was a pizza-shop-cafeteria.



**Laborde's family in the Cafeteria**



**Regina Lutheran School choir visited Santiago in April, 1998**

On April 12 that very year Dr. Hans Luther preached in SANTIAGO, HE WAS THEN THE Berlin Mission Director and is an offspring from John, Luther's brother. In that occasion he came with his wife Ursula.



**Dr. Hans Luther in Santiago**

During 1999 the Cuban Evangelicals Celebration took place with the slogan "Love, Peace and Unit". Rev. Laborde was the Treasure of the public celebration held in Antonio Maceo square in Santiago de Cuba, in July. He was in charge of all logistic assurance for the event and led the funds adequately, gaining credit before the ecumenical movement.

In October 1999, in the middle of a hurricane, a Norwegian work team visited Cuba, they had the intention of exploring the church situation then. They weren't received by IECLC directing board and Rev. Laborde went urgently to Havana to attend the visitors team integrated by Eric Wennerberg, Ana Kristina Pilsen, Tøye Anderson and Helge Adalansvåg. This team travelled to Santiago de Cuba and shared with the local congregation different meetings and activities.



**Norwegian youth teams, October, 1999**



In 2000 brother Carlos Rojo was in charge of the religious service direction at Barnaza 240, later on these services passed to be held on Albear Avenue in El Cerro.



**Bernaza service 240 upstairs**



**Congregation of Cerro**



In March 2000 Dr. Alberto Garcia and his wife Mari, visited the church in SANTIAGO, Alberto besides introducing himself had a meditation on the World and invited Rev. Ismael to visit USA in August that same year, for taking part in the X Spanish Lutheran Conference, which adopted a resolution that support Santiago Synod work.



**Dr. Alberto García and his wife Mori in Santiago**



**Laborde in the LCMS headquarter in Saint Louis, with Oehoni y Bochman**



**Laborde in the Lutheran Laymen league headquarter in meeting with Walt Winters International Director, Susan González and Roberto González, Susan's husband and advisor for Spanish LCMS. Ministries was invited.**

The conversation on the extension theological teaching and working and organization with Douglas Groll, theological Spanish institute Director (TODAY Concordia Seminary Spanish Center in Saint Lois) (30) and professor Dominguez, ended in a nice lunch that Douglas wife offered us in Chicago.



**Dr. Douglas Groll's Home.**



The gathering with Eugenio Gruell and HAERMAN Glinke, who were Lutheran pastors in Cuba in the 60's, pointed the contact and conation with the LCMS past in the island and today's Lutheran Synod whose See IS IN Santiago de Cuba.



**Rev. Laborde and Rev Gruell in Wisconsin**

(31) 1.- In September 2000 THEY WERE MET IN THE MEETING PLACE AT El Cerro church, the ladies from our congregations with the purpose of holding the first Cuban Lutheran ladies 'fraternal gathering and so constitute their league. SOLFRIED lied accompaniment, from Norway was stimulating a woman consecrated to prayer and for her friendship to Cuba.



**Solfrid Lied Ministring in El Cerro**





**Gentleman gathering**

ON December 11 200 in Boca de Dos Rios in Santiago de Cuba it was held a youth fraternal gathering, and so, the Lutheran Young League was constituted.



**Young people in Boca de Dos Ríos Beach, 2000**

The Germans also kept in contact to Santiago Church, so in 2001 Rev. Michel Meyer and his wife Gabriele., from the church Advent played the Hymn "Mighty Castle".



**Rev. Meyer playing piano**

January 2001 was a key year in the Synod International life, in that date the first international agreement was signed, with Terje Homedal, this time with Normission. Oysten and Laborde's dream came true.



**Normission agreement signature, 2001**





**Luis Barreto presents Tesis in Boca de Dos Ríos**

In 2001 the National Directing Board gathered during the Synod celebration in Santiago. The practice of defending thesis was continue for pastoral Ministry ordination, that year Luis Barreto presented his thesis about the Holy Spirit gifts at Leudis'house at Boca de dos Rios beach.



**Lutehran Mass Preparation**

During August 2001, the church gave a forward step at concreting Mass 1, with Maestro Ernesto Burgos as music arrangements and the director of the group, the project was called Cuban roots and ecclesial tradition. It would be followed by mass 2 recording in 2003 with maestro sarvelio Crespo, the classic Son group and later in 2005 and 2007 mases 3 and 4 digitally.





**Premiere of mass 2 in Saint Luke Episcopal Church, in Santiago.**

In the music program insurances in line with Norway Asle, Jon, Sketil and Jan Kristian played an important role. They enjoyed the nice pizza.



**Lutherans Pizzas in Santiago**

The preaching and the drum play by Rev. Ismael as Martha played the piano at Lanvik congregation led by Tom Martin in February 2002 and the State Church relations with the Synod; while the gatherings at Oslo mission offices ratified a walking together-will in the evangelism with Normission.



**Laborde preaches in Mass, in Lanvik**



**Bishop Laborde together to Bishop Olav, in Norway, 2005**

The first ordination to the Holy Ministry were in February 2000. Fulfilling the pastoral commission dictate and Synod agreement Rev. Ismael Laborde, with Rev. Oysten Lied and Rev. Ulises placed their hands on Virgen and Carlos the first one ordained under the new ecclesiastic line.





**First Priest Ordination, 2000**

In March 2003 there were ordained at Saint Luke's Episcopal temple Martha Romero, Pavel Martinez and Yamilka Hernandez as deacons, who together to Rosellys Laborde Montes de Oca, who was ordained as a deacon in 1993, made up the new synod clergy.



**First Deacons Ordination, 2003**

The Santiago de Cuba Lutheran CHURCH continued to its work line and ecumenical relationship, coming to be one of the leaders church in the ecumenical lie.





**Service for Reformation in Salvation Army Church.**

In December 2000 and January 2001 Herman Glinke visited Isle of Pines and Santiago de Cuba accompanied by his wife, his daughter and his son in law Mark Wesling and Mr. Shulz LCMS vice president as Shulz preached Glinke administered the Holy Eucharist.



**Rev. Glinke ministers Eucharist in Santiago.**

In 2002 the Bible studies started at Abel Santamaria neighborhood in Santiago de Cuba, and during 2002 a congregation was constituted in that place. Nowadays this community is led by deacon Pavel Martinez.



**Congregation of Abel Santamaría**

Between 2001 and 2002 the congregations of La Lisa, Artemisa in Havana abandoned IECLC and joined the Lutheran church Santiago Synod.



**Ladies 'fraternal gathering in La Lisa In Havana.**





**Directing board which evaluated pastor layman Carlos Diaz (on the left) and the mission in Matanzas city. September 2003.**

Also in 2002 the Lutheran congregation in Guantanamo was organized on Cuartel NORTE, the workers there were Diorlis Gil, Pavel Martinez and Aramis Rodriguez respectfully.



**Congregation of Guantánamo**



Summer 2002 was an important moment in relationships Cuba-Norway. A14 young team visited our country, 4 of them came to inter-change with the church the ecclesiastic work and ten others came to share its beautiful music. Jan Christian Stoveland, came in front of the group, while Geir was the music director. They donated most of the musical instrument Santiago church has today.



**Norwegian team of young visiting Cuba, 2002.**

The Lutheran church Santiago Synod in 2003 adopted the name United Evangelical Church In Cuba, and it is recognized as Cuban Council of Churches fraternal associated, working legally under its umbrella.

The visits of Norwegians friends from Mandal and Lanvik Churches contributed to rise truthfulness of church members and pastors.



**Visitors from Lanvik and Mandal in Santiago de Cuba**

During 2004 it was organized a LUTHERAN MISSION BY SISTER Yasnay Diaz in Achotal de Monte Ruz in Guantanamo, as an extension of the community which had been risen in La Confianza by the worker Leonardo Molina in 2003.



**Bishop Laborde teaching in Achotal**



**Bishop Laborde ministres in La Confianza**

All these years the Synod has count on the accompaniment of many Norwegian friends, including the accompaniment in prayer and the material and financial support together to the Rev. Ivar Agoy and Oysten Lied advice.



Un 2004 it was held the three part meeting in Gibara between Norwegians- Ecuadorian and Cuban youth, it was an occasion for healthy interchange in relation to a youth ministry with purpose.



It is a pity that in 2004 2005, when Dr. Oysten Lied stopped his work as an advisor due to Terje Homedal disease there was a cool period and misunderstanding between International Direct Sir Tarsiso Vargas, Ecuadorian as an advisor for Cuba. From an imperial mentality or a Metropoli mentality there was a little objective valuation on the seriousness of the UEC administration and particularly from its president, by people who ignore the true history of sacrifice and family endeavor to carry out the challenge of rising a Lutheran church in Cuba.

Happily and for the glory of God, there were changes in Normission. Rev. Laborde visited Norway through a Kai Stoveland invitation, this permitted a gathering and open) with the General Secretary Rolf Kejode and Hans Thore Lovaas, International Director IN May 2006.



**Visit to Linor Studios**





Bishop Laborde visits LANVIK CHURCH IN 2006



Bishop Laborde gathering with Norwegian State church PASTORS IN 2006.



**Meetings with Rolf Kjode, Hans Thore Lovaas and Gunleik Saestad in Oslo, 2005**

Early 2007 Rolf kjode, Normission General Secretary and Ivar Sadness new advisor for Cuba visited Havana, GUANTANAMO And Santiago de Cuba, there was produced a change in the relationships and and healthy and safe relations between the parts were recuperated.



**Rolf's visit to Cuba**



Reverend Hector Mendez preaching, from the reformed Presbyterian Church in Cuba and the accompaniment of Rev. Marcial Miguel Hernandez from the Free Evangelical Church, during the 2006 Synod in Havana showed the ecumenical fraternal character of this institution.



**Rev. Hector Mendez (right) Preacher at Havana 2006 Synod.**



**Rev. Marcial Miguel Hernandez invited to the 2006 Synod in Havana.**



Aramis Rodriguez ordination to be a deacon after finishing his studies at the Seminary left back the ordinations for people without any Biblical and theological preparation.



**Aramís consecration as a deacon, IEL**

The visit of Rosellys Laborde, Daniel Jordan, Luis Barreto and Bishop Laborde to Ecuador in 2004, to Norway in 2006 and to Panama in 2007 consolidated links with our Lutheran friends in Latin America and Europe.



**Youth leaders meetings in Ecuador**

During the visit to Ecuador bishop Laborde ministered a mass in the Lutheran church in La Colmena in Quito.



**Lutheran Church Quito, Ecuador, 2004**

#### **See and church reach.**

In Santiago de Cuba, Granma and Havana the church has works. The Synod is made up by 11 communities, and about 1500 members, its See is in Santiago de Cuba, where the central office stands, there is a polifunctional 4 story building registered by the church name. on the first floor we can find the bishop's office and Joel project, on the second floor stands the Upper Room Temple with room for 200 people, on the third floor there are 4 rooms with air conditioning system, terrace and bathrooms, dinning room- kitchen stands on the fourth floor, there are balconies in it. The next door building has the Concordia Seminary See and a modest printing room.

We should express our thankfulness in the demodulation of this building to Can Do Mission, to Dr. Prece and Mr. Ron Shard and the 17 friends from Texas who visited us, and accompanied us in the construction works and who also gave their donations.



**Can Do supports construction**



The church has had collaboration agreements with Normission, Missionary Society in USA, Concordia Seminary Spanish Studies with the Se in Saint Lois Missouri, and with the LUTHERAN laymen INTERNATIONAL League.

### **Seminary Concordia**



### **Seminary site corridor**

In its theological formation the church organized a three teaching level Seminary: Congregational, Deacon, and Seminary level with a 6 year term. This Seminary has its GENESIS in the advice and teachings from Roberto Huebner during 1994-1995; years in which confession courses were developed by him, Bible's books and other materials in Gerona and Havana. For more than ten years we've focused the exhaustive and careful study of Lutheran Confessions, Systematic Theology and Bible among other great themes. In lectures and recycling workshops for the pastors formation, group of pastors from the Spanish ministry visited Cuba from the synod) since 1994 till 2012 through the Missouri missionary society.



**Dr. Roberto Huebner, Confession course, Isle Pine. 1994.**





**Dr. Douglas Groll, Homiletic and Liturgy course in SANTIAGO 2005.**



**Dr. Alberto Garcia taught a course on Systematic I and II IN Havana, 2008.**



**Rev. Charles Brady, Course on Ephesians in Santiago , 2003.**



**Dr. Marcia Schnor, in Santiago, 2003.**





**Dr. Leopold Sanchez, course Systematic III IN Havana, 2008.**

40 brothers and sisters graduated. The Seminary during this its work has count on the Hispanic Studies Center from Concordia Seminary with See in Saint Lois Missouri.

5 excellent academic professors have visited Cuba bringing books written by them, with the will of teaching and develop recycling workshops on Confessions, Systematic theology, Liturgy, Homiletic, Hermeneutic, Joanie theology, Bible and practical theology among other subjects.



**Thesis Seminary defense. From left to right YAMILKA Hernandez, Martha Romero, and Rosellys Laborde together to Ivar Sadnes.**





**First 5 graduates from Concordia Seminary in Cuba 2009, from left to right Martha Yolanda Romero Lorenzo, Aramis Rodriguez Brooks, Virgen Laborde, Yamilka Hernandez, Rosellys Laborde with Bishop Laborde and Carlos Rojo.**



**Graduation of Seminary 2010. From left to right Ariel Jordan, Daniel Jordan and Norma Murillo.**



**Dr. Rodolfo H.Blank, course Pentateuch, poetic books, in Santiago, 2009**



**MSC.Sergio Frizler. Workshop the pastor's job in Santiago, 2011.**





**Dr. Leopold Sanchez Course Lutheran Cosmo vision, In Santiago, 2012.**



**Course on Sociology and Methodology of investigation. Dr. Victor Tellez, 2013.**





**Bishop Laborde, Theology, Economy and Philosophy, Course,**

This first stage of the new Cuban Lutheran new Synod ends with the legal recognition by the Judicial Ministry of the United Evangelical Church in Cuba, Lutheran Synod in 2012, according to Resolutions 76 stated by National Association Direction of MINJUS. Together to this we got transfer Santiago de Cuba Temple to the Church, and institutional bank account were made. While in January 2013 the church was received by Directing Board of the Cuban Churches Council as a full right member of that religious organization. In May that same year the UEC was received as a Fraternal Member of the Latin American Church Council, until fulfilling the time requirement with independent legal statutes according to nowadays rules.

### **Chapter 3.- Christ For ALL the Nations –Joel Project Cuba.**

#### **3.1- Events and Impact areas.**



**Oficina y voluntarios Navidad 2008.**

BECAUSE OF THE SOCIAL – POLITICAL nowadays Cuban system characteristics, the church has organized its strategy of God's Kingdom spreading growing starting from the Apostles 'method for evangelizing person to person; to small groups and medium size groups; in a frontal way. Unfortunately the Lutheran work didn't have experience in the evangelization ministry. We needed oxygen in order to breathe and reproduce ourselves.

In 2002 we made the first contacts with the international Lutheran Layman league and the Lutheran Hour Ministry in Saint Lois Missouri.

From 2002 with Ken Peterson and Walt Winters visit we started to organize the Christ For All Nations Ministry or the Lutheran Hour Ministry which in the National perspective is called JOEL- Cuba Project. Besides the office personnel, volunteers from different Lutheran congregations and from other evangelical denomination are involved.

The office in Cuba has count these years on the service of a group of brothers and sisters who have worked full time in the organization, promotion and ministry performance; among them we can mention the following ones. Yamilka Hernandez as the first Office Coordinator, Rosellys Laborde Montes de Oca Project Joel in charge, Yanny Moreno animator and Designer, Fernando Sierra, musician and message carrier, Alberto Rojas in charge of written communication and drawer, Yudelka Garcia in charge of public relations and Computer work, Leonardo Sorribe in charge of the computer work and general attendant, Valerio Bringas as cultural activities promoter, Carlos Pavon accountant and attendant for communication and production, Gregorio Ramirez as translator and general attendant and Andres Naples as message carrier. On the other hand the office has been supported by the courageous collaboration of member volunteers from the involved churches whom we don't list in order to avoid an unilateral missing. We have also count on the volunteer pastors of the Ministry as follows: Ulises Aguero, Osmani la O, Julio Moreno, Noris Contreras, jorghe Pena, Raul Rodriguez, Diosmani Mejias, Aramis Rodriguez, Virgen Laborde, Ibrahim Portuondo, Rodriguez, Annia Ether Despaigne Guillot, Teresa Navarro, David Arguelles, Fernando Yola, Aurelio de La Paz, Jose Triana, Marcial Miguel Hernandez, Maria Yi, Juan Miguel Carballosa, Ernesto Aneiros, Julio Cuba, Juan Batista, Yakelin Sanchez Lopez. Any omission is unintentionally.

From a lay and creative vision this Project work the evangelizing activity with all ages and collaborates with the interested evangelical churches, out of the film projection, camps, walks, participation programs, talks, painting contests, music contests, and orientation and advice workshops, biblical courses and evangelistic concerts of JOEL –VIXION musical group : 8 THE GROUP HA HAD THE FOLLOWING volunteer MUSICIANS: Yanni, Yumileidis, Lazaro, Yuslabn, Surian, Yamilka, Fernando, Rosita, Gabriel, Milagros, Yordani, Osmani, Yisel, Losbel, ALEXEI, Alejandro and Danelis) among other ministry work ways.

By this ministry mechanism the gospel has been proclaimed to more than 80 thousand cunan males and females of different ages in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Guantanamo, Holguin, Camagüey, Villa Clara, Havana and Havana city.



**Working Team, I Gibara -2003**



**II Camp in Gibara- 2004.**





**Epiphany, Saint John Methodist Church, Santiago de Cuba., 2004.**



**Music contest. Methodist Church (Saint John), Santiago de Cuba, 2004.**



Jury for music contest, Maestro Esmerido Betancourt, Xiomara and Sarvelio Crespo, 2005.



TALKS in upstairs El Gallito at Enramadas, Santiago de Cuba, 2003.





**Evangelistic walk to Siboney beach, 2003.**



**Workshop "single mothers", Salvation Army, in Santiago, 2004.**





**Joel Vixion group, Young Communist League Theater, Santiago de Cuba, 2007.**

Special meaning in the Lay people presentation for the personal evangelism have had the workshops Equipping the Saints. For its efficient development the office elaborated a manual which comprises: base, goal, strategy, methods, basic knowledge for personal evangelism, communication and follow up ways.

Until July 2009, 637 Saints had been equipped for the evangelism in Santiago de Cuba, Holguin , Santa Clara, Florida, Camaguey, Havana, Placetas, Guantanamo, Mayari and Jamaica. The workshops teachers have been the brothers, Edilberto Mendez, Yamilka Hernandez, Ismael Laborde, Noris Contreras, Lazaro Duanu, Osmany La O and Martha Romero.



**Equipping evangelists. Pentecostal holiness church, Palma Soriano, 2006.**



**Equipping evangelists. Congregational church, Santiago de Cuba.. JUNE 2009.**

Since 2004 the office has been working the supporting line to people who live with AIDS and third age people, to who orientation and advice workshop are offered, healthy enjoy activities, all from a Bible and holistic perspective.



**Third age project, 2004.**





**Support lineAIDV-AIDS, 2006.**

With great affect we always thank: Mr. Ken Peterson, Adviser for the Lutheran Hour Ministry for Latin America, who supported Yamilka Hernandez as coordinator for the office during the Ministry organization and helped us to perfect the evangelizing vision of Lutherans in Cuba.



**Ken PETERSON VISIT, AT UPSTAIRS GALITO Enramadas, Santiago de Cuba, 2003.**



At elaborating these memories it is fair to recognize the accompaniment of working team of CPTLN-Panama Office, they all have been blessing canals for Cuba, Porfirio who visited us twice and pressed in our young people the JOEL Spirit, to Itza who supported us with orientation and materials, Zuleika, always ready with information and designs, to Ezequiel, who supported us in the preparation of our internet site, to Wendy for her attentions, to Milton from the Lutheran church for his solidarity and specially to graduate Edilberto Mendez for his friendship and collaboration on economic procedures and other spheres.



**Panama Team**



**Visit to Panama, CPTLN Latin America Directors Gathering , 2008.**

JOEL LIFE AND the church life are connected to Brian Stewart and ATION International, they have supported us with their prayers, their friendship and material solidarity, we won't forget that the T-shirts worn in the first evangelistic Camp of Cuba at Gibara in the Quakers place were donated by them, thanks for Janell visit, thanks brothers for being blessing canals.



**Rev. Laborde and Licensed Brian from ACTION International as tourists in Big Rock highway.**

It is a pity that the agreements between Laborde and Ken Peterson which dated May 3, 2002 were broken and violated by Mr. Nilo Figur, Latin America Lutheran Hour Advisor notifying on May 21, 20012 to bishop Laborde that they would close the office in Cuba on June ,2012. This painful and irresponsible decision of the Lutheran Hour created a complicated situation for Lutherans in Cuba, as for the legal working obligations with the personnel, as for the approved projects.

Facing this new situation that was produced, The Joel Cuba Foundation was constituted from now on with its own searching funds and would continue being the promoter for the Lutheran children Bible education, it will offer workshops, evangelism services for orientation, advice and formation with the churches linked to us, they'll also work with vulnerable groups, psychosocial trouble by disasters and links to civil society.



**Mutual Help Team, walk to Big Rock.**





**Service to prisoners in Guantanamo penitentiary.**



**Gathering between Cosmo visions, Young Communist League and Joel Project, 2010.**





**Santiago Civil Society Forum, Heredia Theater, 2008**



**Bishop Laborde in Santiago Civil Society Forum against USA blockade against Cuba, Heredia Theater, 2008.**



**Meeting History, Lutheran youth and kids, Morro Fortress, Santiago de Cuba, 2008.**



**Meeting History, Lutheran KIDS at Moncada Garrison Museum, 2010.**





**Evangelism at large. Projection and film debate in Mayari town, 2008.**

### **3.2 Ecumenical church will.**

We're an ecumenical church will, we consider that ecumenism is a gift from God, for dwelling in the big house created by Himself. Since 1992 we have manifested a sincere disposition to dialogue and evangelic- biblical interchange with other tradition Christians, without refusing to our faith confessions.



**Santiago Celebration, July 12 2009.**



**Civil and Evangelical authorities at Evangelical Celebration, 2009.**

From 2003 to 2011 the IEU (UEC) was a fraternal associated to C.C.C and it's approved as a full right member in 2012.

Rev. Laborde was a representative in the Cuba's Bible Commission an activity he did at the same time being a C.C.C coordinator for Santiago de Cuba and during 2008-2010 ruling period he was elected as one of the vice presidents of the Cuban Churches Council.

Various national directives, pastors and laypeople of the UEC have actively participated in Directing Boards, other events and celebrations sponsored by C.C.C the congregations are educated in the development of ecclesial interaction, without refusing to Lutheranism historical confessions.

In 2013 the UEC was received as an observer member of CLAI and we partially should thank the support in the Maria YI and Nilton Giese procedures, this last one in his Secretary character of the organism.

The Ministry characteristic Joel-Cuba-Project, which in its acting includes different denomination congregations which is an evidence of the practicing ecumenism by our side.



**Meeting with USA Christians and Evangelical Pastors at UEC in Santiago de Cuba.**



## **CHAPTER 4.- OUR SEAL“ THE Cuban root”.**

### **4.-1 LITURGY AND MUSIC.**

1.- We're a confessional confessant Lutheran Synod in which adhesion to Lutheran, tradition and church renewal are combined in middle of the Cuban culture contest.

This church and liturgy renewal process has its base in the criterion that the church tradition has been and it is a holy Spirit work, who by means of the men, women, clergy and laypeople, kids, young, adults and older in all ages and latitudes have brought fresh to Israel. We preserve tradition for love and particularly the liturgy. Deny or refuse these gifts of history, it is to deny ourselves and a lack of love.

But on the other hand to inherit the best of our Christian service tradition, it's the guarantee to have the spiritual privilege of giving by us to the new generations our contribution that tomorrow will be tradition.

The essential is to be dialed with the Gospel of Grace and not under law. We shouldn't keep liturgy, but we should live the ancient and modern liturgy, it is like a symbiosis in which we receive from history and offer to history.

This spirit encourage us to conceive, with God's help, the project of Cuba root and Ecclesial tradition, we live in a Caribbean country, where son, bolero, Havana song, guajira, cha cha, meringue, cumbia, calypso, country music and

Many other popular dances, we're people and church, that's why we should have a living experience, we should be authentic, original, not a copy from other cultures. We are a mosaic, we are a mix and it is a privilege to offer God the fruit of our effort, our talents, I mean our music and our dances, this together to our material and money offerings, these are our rational cult to the Lord.

The liturgy orders to which we have introduce our musical rhythms and melodies, are the combination of the orders registered in the Christian cult, in LCMS book, Sing to the Lord and the ELCA Songs and liturgy book, together to small contributions in the text composition and the composition measure of melodies by Licensed Martha Romero and Maestro Esmerido Betancourt.



**Maestro Esmerido Betancourt and Martha in SANTIAGO.**



**Closing Mass 2009, Santiago de Cuba.**



**Baptism of Danays Hung, 1997.**



Up to now we have recorded 4 Cuban masses, and a fifth disc is in process with the Lord help that together to the disc "brothers" made in collaboration with Sister Froydis, as well as kids and young from Lanvik church and choirs contributions at Linor's studios of Norway are a beautiful contribution to Christian culture.

The liturgically ordered services are a beautiful gift from God's church, which doesn't avoid creativity and spontaneous manner, into the ordered limits and decency, for this reason there is a unit in diversity in the Synod, the congregations have liberty to make their liturgical arrangements according to their expectations respecting always the existence of 4 essential points : Confession, Bible readings, preaching and Holy Communion. Worship and praise imply freedom in Spirit, order living faith experience, for we praise a crucified Christ, who was risen from the dead and who will live for ever. Because He lives we will win today and tomorrow.

A pretty traditional Hymns combination, liturgical songs, choirs, psalms and modern songs, with poetry, testimonies, dances and dance is our present to God and the Lutheran church in America and the world. We are coming from the Hill and sing the Plains.

The liturgies developed in the synods, ordinary or special services have permitted to sow a church with measure starting from celebrating the Lutheran traditions.



**Synod 2008, Pastors and Deacons in Havana. From left to right Deacons Yamilka Hernandez, Martha Y. Romero, Rev. Carlos Rojo, Bishop Laborde, Deacon Aramis Rodriguez, Rev. Virgen Laborde, Deacons Ernesto Aneiro, Pavel Martinez and Rosellys Laborde.**



**Mass baptism in Achotal de Monterruz, 2004.**



**Eucharist in the Free Evangelical Church in Havana.**





**First Communion, 2009 in Santiago.**

## **Chapter 5 New Events and Realities.**

### **5.1 Visits.**



**Visit to Cuba of young boys and girls from Denmark with Bible donation, 2010.**



**Norwegian choir, brothers who support Guantanamo construction in Achotal.**

## **5.2 New Ordinations.**

Between the years 2010 to 2016 new events which deserve to be gathered in this process of the book checking we're presenting you.

New Ordinations.



**Deacon Norma Murillo, 2011**



**Deacon Milaidis Herrera Hechavarria, 2012.**





**Priests Rossellys Laborde, Yamilka Hernandez, Martha Yolanda Romero and Deacon Gregorio Ramirez, 2014.**



**Perpetua Deacons Ángela Figueroa and Candelaria Figueroa, 2015.**

The pastoral clothes for the new ordinations have been donated by means of bishop Halvor from Norway and bishop Medardo from El Salvador. Thanks to the donators.

At the electing Synod 2016 the church gave its vote to support Bishop Laborde re-election whose installation was done by bishop Ulises Aguero Prendes from the Episcopal Church.



### 5.3 New Missies and Congregations.

The new ordinations mainly response to the process of new mission and congregations sow.



**Church Achotal de Monterruz.**





**Mission San Justo, Guantanamo.**



**Mission Manzanillo. Granma**



**Mission Jamaica, Guantanamo.**



**Baptism in Mission Holguin 2012.**





**Mission Holguin, 2012.**



**Bible study at San Emilio, 2011.**



**Starting Mission Dos Caminos de San Luis (Dr. Alberto Garcia ASND Can Do leaders visit)**



**Sueno Bible school in Santiago de Cuba, 2010.**





**Marti Bible school in Santiago de Cuba, 2010.**



**Church Christ BODY, Guantanamo.**



**Church Christ Lives. Community El Dajao.**



**Church Christ Redeemer. Marmol neighborhood. Altamira.**





**Korean brothers and sisters who live in the USA participate.**



**Church Our Savior. Veguita de Galo Neighborhood**



**Mission Marianao. Havana City**



**Baptism in Mission Marianao. Havana City**

#### 5.4 Humanitarian HELP To The People.

In the past years the church has been involved in humanitarian help to people affected by hurricanes. Lutheran Teams of volunteers and from other churches have used funds gotten from Normission (Norway), Missionary Society, Action International and Act Alianza.



Bishop Laborde with Pastors Yamilka and Rosellys Laborde in Baracoa. Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.



Pastoral accompaniment Service due to hurricanes Ike and Gustav, Guantanamo.



Help due to Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.



Tile delivered to El Dajao Town people damaged by Sandy hurricane



Mattress delivery to people damaged by Sandy Hurricane.



Christmas supper delivery to people around the Church damaged by Sandy Hurricane.





Rev. Ismael Laborde. SAN Agustin Community. Affected by Sandy hurricane.



Kerosene post destroyed. Saint Augustine Community.

### PROJECT JOEL FOUNDATION.

Project Joel Foundation- Cuba is in charged of the evangelization, Bible kids education, advice and orientation workshops, and diaconal activity, humanitarian help related to the civil society and self sustainable projects.





Another element in development taken by the church by means of Joel Project in Coordination to Normission has been the implementation of 3 self sustainable projects, with financial support which are: A printing machine, a rabbit case an a tinsmithing, welding and paint workshop. Starting from agreements with other parkers it also exists the lodging and food service for local and foreigners visitors and we count on a bus for transportation service which has 44 seats.



**Bus donated by Pastors For Peace.**



**Rabbit Cage Project.**



**Printing machine**



**Auto motor.**

There are other projects in implementation phase, with the aim of facing the eventual stoppage of foreign support to the church, as it is the case of the beauty parlor and churros sale.



**Beauty Parlor.**



**Churros Machine.**



### 5.6 Foundational phase U.E.C Conclusion.

All this information responses to the United Evangelical Church foundational phase in the Cuba's Lutheran Synod; phase which closes with the membership petition to the World Lutheran Federation presented in March 2016, and Bishop Laborde's visit to El Salvador in August 2016, to the celebrations for the 46 anniversary of Salvadorian Lutheran Church and 30 Anniversary of Medardo Gomez as a Bishop.

With this Episcopal consecration, of Bishop Laborde in Santiago de Cuba the foundational UEC phase concludes and opens a new chapter of an independent National Church according to its Constitution and according to the Episcopal Consecration, at entering in the Episcopal historical line which is received by Sweden Lutheran Church line on this June 17, 2017.



**Bishop Medardo Gomez and Bishop Laborde, in Faith and Hope Church, in El Salvador, August 7, 2016**



**Bishop Laborde in Easter Sunday Celebration, 2017**

Bishop Ulises Agüero from the Episcopal Church and Bishop Medardo Gomez from El Salvador were in charge of bishop Laborde's consecration.

Institution of the Eucharist were present Martha Yolanda Romero, Yamilka Hernandez, Rev Leonel A. Cruz (El Salvador) Rev. Milaidis Herrera, Bishop Ulises Aguero, Rev. Aramis Rodriguez, Bishop Ismael Laborde, Bishop Medardo Gomez, Rev. Blanca Irma Rodriguez(El Salvador), Rev. Rosellys Laborde, Rev Virgen Laborde, Rev Miguel Acosta (ELCA) and Rev Halbert Pons from the Episcopal Church in Cuba.



**Consacration Bishop Ismael Laborde, 17 junio, 2017, Bishop Medardo Gómez and Ulises Agüero.**